



**ARTHUR
VOLSKY**



**STEPAN
THE GRAND,
THE MASTER-
HAND**

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A TALE
FOR
THE THEATRE
AND
ALSO
FOR
READING

MINSK
YUNATSTVA PUBLISHERS
1982

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When did this really happen?

A long time ago.

At the time when this fairy-tale was just being started by the people.

And now I'll try to tell it. True, a little in my own way...

On the outskirts of a small village there was a poor household at the foot of a small hill. Nearby an age-old forest rose up to the sky like a dark jagged comb. A lake glistened in the sun. There were clouds sailing in the sky. Very much like geese. And there were geese on the lake. Very much like clouds. In a word, a bit of paradise. As they used to say of old.

But the poor shoemaker Stepan was far from living in a paradise. He used to sit by the open door of his tumble-down shack, making boots and singing a song all the while:

Boot-making for soldiers is a job

With which one's heart will sure throb!

Indeed,

Indeed!

No better work I know!

I just adore this splendid job —

With soldiers always I hobnob,

I make a lot of dough,

And it fares well with me,

With me,

With me,

And it fares well with me!

Suddenly sounds of a hunting horn came from beyond the forest. The din of a crowd of people grew louder and drew nearer. The roaring of wild beasts could be heard.

Stepan pricked up his ears:

"Can that be a war beginning?"

A fox ran into the yard. A common Red Fox. Quite out of breath. Terrified.

"Save me, good man! Save me from pursuit! The Tsar and his retinue are hunting here."

The hunting horn sounded quite near.

The Fox rushed about the yard looking for a hiding-place.

"Oh! They'll be here right away!.."

"Run into the hut, Fox, hide under the bench," and Stepan helped the Fox to pass.

No sooner had the Fox disappeared into the hut than a group of mounted soldiers led by a moustached general entered the yard.

"Hey! Shoemaker! Didn't you see a Red Fox?" the General called without dismounting. "He went this way..."

"No, sir, I didn't," the shoemaker replied. The General scowled at his men:





"You half-wits! Missed a chance like that! The Tsar's daughter wouldn't grudge decoration for such a gift..."

The sound of the bugle came again. This time it had a solemn ring.

The General instantly drew himself up:

"His Majesty the Tsar with the royal Princess his daughter are on their way here! Hey, you. (This to his men.) Stand ready! Keep this stupid fellow out of sight with your bodies. He doesn't cut much of a figure... Quick."

The soldiers lined up and hid the shoemaker Stepan with their broad backs.

A magnificent coach and six fine white horses came into the yard. No sooner had it come to a stop than a host of Maids of Honour and Courtiers rushed to its door. Two of them opened the door and lowered the gilded steps.

The Tsar was the first to alight. The Princess followed him. As soon as her feet touched the ground, she made a wry face.

The retinue struck up a song:

We glorify our Tsar,
When he is gentle,
And when irate,
His royal name

We celebrate!
We glorify our Tsar!
Here the soldiers took it up:
We glorify the Tsar — hurrah!
We glorify the Tsar — hurrah!
Glory to him —
hurrah! hurrah! hurrah!



The Maids of Honour began to sing glory to
the Princess:

The splendour of the royal household —
The Princess — we'll immortalize —
She puts in shade the early sunrise
Whose beauty is untold!

The soldiers again joined in together with the Maids of Honour:

Glory to her —

hurrah!

Glory to her —

hurrah!

Glory —

hurrah! hurrah! hurrah!

As soon as the echo of the last "hurrah" died in the forest, the General took three steps towards the Tsar.

"The hunters have had such a big kill that there are enough skins to fit out the whole army with caps," he said.

He spoke so loudly that the Princess had to stop her ears with her hands. As she walked she seemed to limp on one leg.

"All right! That's good," said the Tsar, but he did not sound interested. "You had better tell us how to help the Princess. Don't you see that one of her shoes pinches?"

"We'll fix it instantly," the General said happily as he was glad to show his prowess. "We foresaw a thing like that! Hey, you!" He ordered. "Formation! Left face! Right face! Open ranks! Hey, shoemaker the grand, the master-hand! Show what you're good for!"

"Princess," Stepan said rising from the threshold, "throw your shoe here." At this moment his eyes met the Princess' glance.

"Fool!" thundered the General. "How dare you talk to Her Highness in this manner?"

And, bending double, he took the shoe off the Princess' foot and handed it to Stepan.

But the man could not take his eyes off the Princess. Her face, as fresh as a daisy. Her graceful carriage. Her lovely foot...

"What on earth! Are you in your right mind?" the General was foaming with rage as

he rushed towards Stepan. "Get down to work, you fool!"

Stepan came to life:

"I'll make a good job with my hammer!"

And he set about his job at once, humming a song. The Princess followed his every movement with the greatest interest.

Meanwhile the Tsar busied himself with state affairs.

"Isn't this the man who has been assigned to make boots for our valiant army?" he asked the General.

"He is, Sire," the General said.

"He's an expert hand," the Tsar commented.

And the Princess came up to Stepan, took the shoe and began examining it...

"Permit me, Miss..."

Stepan carefully put the shoe on her lovely foot.

"Look, he's never at a loss!" the General cried and tried to push the shoemaker aside, but the Princess intervened.

"Ah, General, General! Shame on you! This man's hands are much more skillful than yours. And then he is younger than you!"

The General, put to shame, looked embarrassed. The Tsar came to his rescue.

"My dear daughter, you ought not to treat your betrothed like that."

He turned to the General and went on:





"I confer an order upon you for your excellent service and ingenuity."

"At your service, Sire!" the General rapped out happily as he stood at attention as straight as his big belly would allow him.

The Princess lightly stamped her foot on which she wore the shoe that had just been mended. She did not feel the least pain and stamped her foot again. Then she said:

"Dad, you had better order the shoemaker to be rewarded as he deserves."

"Did you hear, General?" the Tsar demanded.

"Yes, Sire, I did." And the General stood at attention again.

"Do as you are told."

The Tsar walked to his carriage. The servile Courtiers had already opened the door for him.

Putting one foot on the steps the Princess turned and waved her handkerchief to the shoemaker. To say good-bye. Evidently for the only reason of teasing the General.

Now the carriage disappeared round the corner, but Stepan stood looking after it. As though he were enchanted.

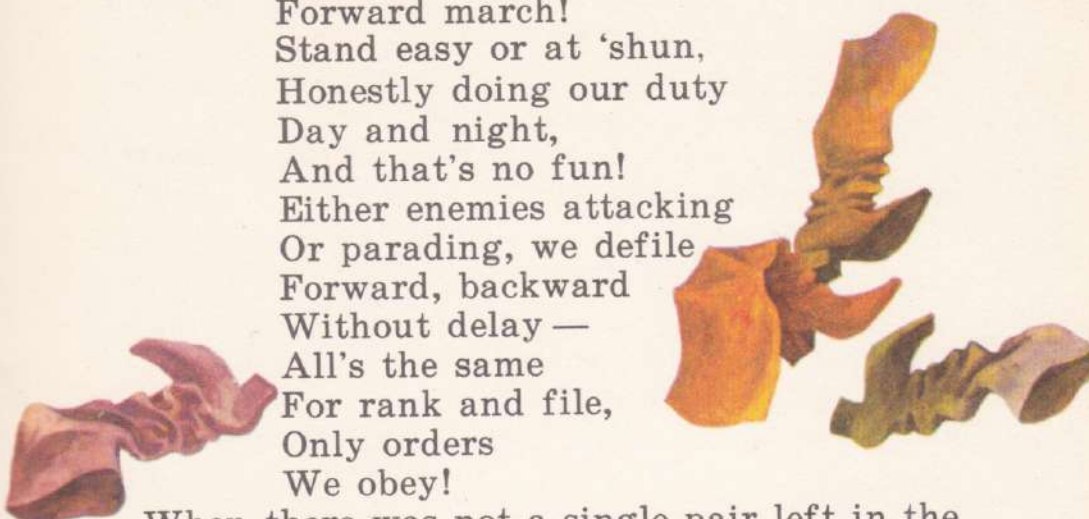
"Again lost your senses, eh, you blockhead!" the General thundered. "Is the Tsar's order ready?"



"It is, Sir," Stepan replied. "Just before you came I'd driven in the last nail."

"Fetch the boots along," the General ordered.

The soldiers searched every nook. And they did this in a jolly soldierly manner. With a song:



Left, right, left!
Right, left, right!
Forward march!
Stand easy or at 'shun,
Honestly doing our duty
Day and night,
And that's no fun!
Either enemies attacking
Or parading, we defile
Forward, backward
Without delay —
All's the same
For rank and file,
Only orders
We obey!

When there was not a single pair left in the hut, the General ordered:

"Hey, you! To horse! Dress! Quick march — at a trot!"

"What about the money?" Stepan shouted after the General, nearly on the verge of tears.

The General reined in his horse.

"Fool, be thankful that your audacity has not cost you your head!"

"But the Tsar said you should settle with me."

However, Stepan's words were drowned by the stamping of the horses' hooves and the soldiers' jaunty song:

Left, right, left!
Right, left, right!
Forward march!
Stand easy or at 'shun,
Honestly doing our duty

Day and night,
And that's no fun!

Stepan seated himself at the threshold. He still felt like crying. Now, he thought, there was nothing left for him but to go begging...

At that moment the Fox jumped out of the hut.

"Oh, I was out of my wits with fright while they were collecting the footwear... Why are you looking so dismal, Stepan? Don't take it so much to heart! You helped me out. Now, one good turn deserves another."

"But what can you possibly do, Fox?" Stepan inquired sullenly.

"Would you like me to try and arrange your engagement to the Princess?"

"Why, have you taken leave of your senses?"

"But would you really like it?" the Fox winked in a wily manner at the man. "I saw the way you looked after her... Well, I say, brother, make boots for me... high boots... the kind that noblemen wear."

"What do you need those boots for?"

"To put the dogs off the scent... And then do everything I tell you. Settled?"

"All right. Even so, I have no other way out... I feel like going and getting drowned. But if I marry the Princess, I'll be able to feather my nest... As for the boots... I've got a pair... stowed away... wanted to sell 'em at the fair. Well, be it as it may! Take them, Fox."

And Stepan gave the boots to the Fox. The kind that noblemen wore!

The Fox was overjoyed. He pulled them on his feet at once.

"As for the hood and jacket, I'll be able to get them myself," he said. He looked admiringly at the new boots for a long time and then, by way of showing off, broke into a song:

The one with whom I'm close,
With whom I'm arm in arm —
This secret I'll disclose —
Will never come to harm.
Search all the forests,
You just mind —
A fox like me
You won't find!

And Stepan, forgetting his sorrow, took up
the refrain of the Fox's song:

Astray the dogs will go,
All thrown off the scent.
Out of gratitude, you know,
On serving you I'm bent.

Stepan did not only sing with the Fox, but
danced round him:

Search all forests,
You just mind —
A fox like me
You won't find!

The Fox took Stepan's hand and started dancing
with him:

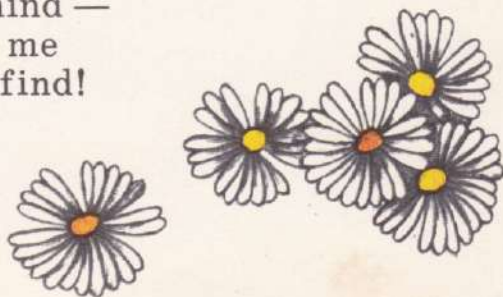
To the sovereign's manor
I'll shortly come, Stepan,
And in a wondrous manner
I'll make you a nobleman!

Stepan only waved his hand. By way of saying,
"That is beyond me!" But he took up the
refrain:

Search all forests,
You just mind —
A fox like me
You'll never find!

They both liked the song so much that they
sang it over again:

Search all forests,
You just mind —
A fox like me
You won't find!





The Fox was running through the wood. He felt gay. He would stop now and then to look at his new boots. As he glanced at them, he would jump up with joy and begin singing. Well, what was that song about? Here it is:

These boots I sing!
These boots I sing!
They're a very special thing!
They help me run,
It is great fun
When *in* the hunting
Dogs are done!

Though the pack
Does howl somewhere,
They'll never get the scent, I swear.
Not a beast,
To say the least,
I am Fox in boots — not beast!

You, Stepan,
You, Stepan,
I shall make a nobleman.
Therefore
I now bolt
To the royal household.

These boots I sing!
These boots I sing!
They are a very special thing!

Not a beast,
To say the least,
I'm Fox in boots — not beast!..

At that time hares were gamboling and frisking on the glade. The oldest Hare watched the younger friskers romp around. Smiling contentedly. He encouraged them with a song as he clapped his hands beating the rhythm of the song and the gambols.

The younger hares began to turn somersaults, leaping one over another. They joined in the singing together with the Old One. And also beat the rhythm. Now by clapping their hands, now by tapping their feet.

Stonecrop,
Stonecrop,
How lush it grows,
Though this plant
One never sows!

Stamp-stamp-stamp!

Run, hares, run!

We might've had some real fun!

Stamp-stamp-stamp!

Run, hares, run!

We could've had some real fun!

We're unwilling,
We're unwilling
To leave the plot.
The dogs are coming —
Well get it hot!

Ah-ah-ah!

How we fear!

No, we cannot breakfast here!

Ah-ah-ah!

How we fear!

No, we can't have dinner here!

Stonecrop,
Stonecrop,
How lush it grows,



Though this plant
One never sows!
Stamp-stamp-stamp!
Run, hares, run!
We might've had some real fun!
Stamp-stamp-stamp!
Run, hares, run!
We could've had some real fun!

And then suddenly... What happened? Why
did the hares stop their games and frolics? Why
did they bolt into the bushes like crazy?

Aha, it was clear now. The Fox ran into the
glade. Singing all the time. Admiring his boots.

Wait you, hares,
Wait, oh wait,
Here I am,
Your friend and mate.
Some good news to you
I bring,

I won't harm you — no such thing!

The hares looked out from behind the bushes.
No wonder — of course, they were curious.

How important
Is the news?
How could it
Be put to use?

The Fox was harping on the same string:

Look, what boots!
These boots I sing —
They are a very special thing!
Not a beast,
To say the least,
I'm Fox in boots — not beast!

The Old Hare started up with amazement:

Those boots are
Rare,
Rare!
So uncommon
For Fox to wear!



The surprised hares got out from behind the bushes. They made for the Fox. And forgot all about the danger. Only the Old Hare who was on his guard inquired, just in case:

"You, Fox, will you really not hurt us?"

"I tell you I will not."

The Old Hare also felt emboldened.

"Why did you put on the boots?" he ventured.

"Solve a riddle, then I'll tell you."

"Out with it, out with it," the hares demanded, "and be quick!" The Fox was lost in thoughts for a moment:

Do you
This watchful
Creature know,
Who is for hares
The bitter'st foe?

The hares began to confer with each other. In whispers. Suddenly out leaped one of them. The youngest. The quickest one.

"It's the Fox!"

The Fox gave him a reproachful glance. He shook his head and said in the humblest manner:

"How can you call me your enemy?"

The Old Hare came forward. He looked around cautiously not to be (God forbid!) overheard and said almost in a whisper. And almost into the very ear of the Fox:

"Wo-o-lf..."

Hardly had the Fox recovered from surprise when a wolf did jump onto the glade. This was not just some kind of a wolf. This was the Leader of the Wolves. The other wolves surrounded the glade on all sides. To prevent anyone of the hares making his escape.

The Leader of the Wolves grinned maliciously. He patted his belly and began singing in a complacent manner:

Now talk of the devil...
We wolves — the bunnies' foes.
In killing most I revel —
My teeth I snap, and the hare goes!

The Leader of the Wolves took hold of the Old Hare and went round with him in a fearful dance. And each of the other wolves seized a hare. And also spun them in a dance as they joined in the Leader of the Wolves' song:



We, wolves,
We're hunting,
We'll search every nook.
We'll search everywhere,
Run here, run there,
We're here, just look!
We'll search everywhere,



Run here, run there,
We're here, just look!

There is no telling how long the wolves would
have mocked the hares had the Fox not stepped
in:

Wait you, wolves!
Wait, oh wait!
Here I am, your friend and mate.
Some good news
To you I bring.
What a very special thing!

The Leader of the Wolves stopped short.
But he would not let his Hare go.

Let us listen
To the news!
No, this chance
We cannot lose!

The Fox harped on the same string:
Look, what boots!
These boots I sing —
They are a very special thing!
Not a beast,
To say the least,
I am Fox in boots — not beast!

The Leader of the Wolves started up with
surprise and released his hold on the Old Hare.
The other wolves, too, let their hares go. They
could not help admiring the Fox's boots.

Those boots are
Rare,
Rare!
So uncommon
For Fox to wear!

The Leader of the Wolves howled with envy:
Ou-ou-ou!

Either it only seems to me
Or I'm simply dreaming it!
About Puss in boots I heard,

you see,

Not of Fox in boots —

I must admit!

Both the wolves and the hares started talking together:

Not about Fox,

Not about Fox,

Not about Fox in boots —

I must admit!

But the Leader of the Wolves put a stop to this hubbub.

"Why did you put on those boots?" he asked.

"Solve my riddle, then I'll tell you."

"The one that the hares could not solve?"

"Exactly."

"Well, repeat it."

And the Fox willingly repeated:

Do you

This watchful

Creature know

Who's for wolves

The bitter'st foe?

The Leader of the Wolves winked at the wolves in a conspiratorial manner. Also at the hares.

"Is there anybody who does not know that?"

All of this

In mind you bear:

We of hunting dogs beware!

No danger will they

Dare,





But don't trust them,
Wolf and hare!

And again a hubbub arose. Both the wolves
and the hares started talking all at once.

All of this,
All of this,
All of this in mind you bear:
We of hun-
We of hun-
We of hunting dogs beware!

"Hey you! Silence!" the Leader of the Wolves
shouted impatiently. And, turning to the Fox, he
said to him still more politely:

"I say, Fox, why did you put on those boots?"

"Clever and quick-witted as you are, haven't
you guessed yet?"

"Me?.. Hm... Surely, I have. But they don't
know yet," the Leader of the Wolves pointed to
the wolves and hares. "Do say it quickly!"

"Just to escape from the dogs," the Fox
replied and broke into a song:

Now howl,
You, wicked pack.
You can't follow my track!
Not a beast,
To say the least,
I am Fox in boots —

not beast!

"Wait! Wait!" The Leader of the Wolves stopped him. "Where did you get such boots?"

"They are a gift from Stepan the Grand, the Master-Hand," the Fox readily explained. "And he gives such boots to everyone who enters his service and serves him well."

"I wish he'd give me a pair," the Leader of the Wolves said eagerly.

"But why not?"

"One for each of us, too," the other wolves stirred uneasily.

"For you, too."

"And what about us?" asked the Old Hare.

"For you as well, to be sure."

Oh, how the beasts made merry! All of them, big and small. They were ready to join in a single friendly round dance. But the Leader of the Wolves asked, just to make sure:

"But won't you cheat us, Fox?"

"Did I ever cheat you?"

The Fox pretended to forget the story about that ice-hole where the Wolf had all but lost his tail. And the Wolf decided not to recall it. He had such an earnest desire to get the new boots.

"Well, all right," he said, "take us as quickly as possible to that...what's his name?"

"Stepan the Grand, the Master-Hand," the Fox prompted, "it's time you remembered it."

"Yes, take us to Stepan the Grand, the Master-Hand. We want to enter his service," the Leader of the Wolves said by way of completing his thought.

"Take us to him, too," the Old Hare asked.
And all the beasts took it up:

Take us quickly to Stepan!

Take us quickly to Stepan!

The Grand —

The Grand —

The Master-Hand!

"No, no, my dear brothers!" the Fox objected.
"It happens that I just can't do it now. I am
going in the opposite direction. To carry out
Stepan's order."



"Well, what's to be done?" the Leader of the
Wolves said sadly. "Can't you put in a word
for us with him?"

"At least introduce us to him," the Old Hare
chimed in.

"There!" the Fox cried slapping his boot with
his hand. "Do Stepan the Grand, the Master-
Hand a good turn to begin with. Then he
is sure to pay you back in the same coin."

"What good turn do you mean?" the Leader
of the Wolves wondered.

"What good turn?" the Old Hare echoed.

"You will have to accompany me to the Tsar's court..."

"They'll give us a hiding there, to be sure," the Leader of the Wolves said gloomily.

"No escape from a hiding," the Old Hare agreed.

"But say you are sent by Stepan the Grand, the Master-Hand," the Fox reassured them. "Then no one will lift his hand against you."

"Did you hear that?" the Leader of the Wolves asked his pack. "We are sent by Stepan the Grand, the Master-Hand!"

"We are sent by Stepan the Grand, the Master-Hand," the wolves repeated in chorus.

"Did you hear that?" the Old Hare asked his subordinates. "We are sent by Stepan the Grand, the Master-Hand!" the hares shouted less loudly than the wolves but with no lesser fervour.

And all of them said it over in chorus:

"We are all sent by Stepan the Grand, the Master-Hand."

"That's good," the Fox said cheerfully. "Come!" And he began singing:

If questions are put to you,
You wolves, or you hares,
Don't try to evade them,
Speak as plain as you can:
You are hearty supporters
Of the nobleman who bears —
Who proudly bears —

The commonplace name of — Stepan!

The beasts took up the closing words and, forming couples — wolf and hare, wolf and hare — they waltzed round and round:

We are hearty supporters
Of the nobleman who bears —
Who proudly bears —

The commonplace name of — Stepan!

The Leader of the Wolves could not hold himself back and joined in.

We have faith in friendship...
— he began.

Not was the Old Hare willing to lag behind.
So he repeated:

We have faith in friendship!
They exchanged glances and sang on in chorus:
In generous friendship
We all — to a man.

And all the wolves took it up:

For we are in the service...
The hares instantly joined in:

For we are in the service...
Now all the voices merged into a choir:
For we are all in the service
Of th' distinguished Stepan.

The Fox could not hold himself back from:
Stepan the Grand,
the Master-Hand!

The wolves seized the hares, lifted them above their heads, put them on their shoulders and, dancing and singing, marched after the Fox.





The Princess sat on the throne in the throne-hall of the Tsar's palace, her bare feet under her. She was moping.

All over the hall were scattered shoes and boots of various shapes and colours.

Her dreamy eyes fixed upon some unseen point in the distance, the Princess was singing a song.

And the Tsar? The Tsar was kneeling near the throne. He would pick up the shoes and boots that matched and hand them to the Princess.

But she only sat shaking her head and went on singing:

I'm weary of sorrowing
From night till early morn.
Why not a country woman
But Princess was I born?
I'd go to the meadow
And on the grass I'd tread,
I would not ride in a carriage
But walk barefoot instead!

"Daughter, darling!" the Tsar tried to stop her. "Just have a look at this pair... Aren't they lovely? Goodness knows from what country they were brought!.."

But the Princess paid no attention to him.

No barrier I know,
My mind your warnings slip,
And barefoot I'll go
On an unending trip!



"But you'll hurt your toes!" the Tsar said, nearly on the verge of tears.

At last the Princess looked at her father:

"If you, Dad, do not want me to go barefoot, order that shoemaker to be brought here..."

The Tsar looked blank.

"What shoemaker?" he queried.

"The man who made the boots for the army and mended my shoe," the Princess explained.

I'm weary of sorrowing

From night till early morn.

Why not a country woman

But Princess was I born?

At this moment the General tumbled into the hall. He was quite out of breath. He turned to the Tsar and the Princess:

"Sire! Your Highness! You can't find a pair lovelier than this one in the whole world! It was brought all the way from China!"

And he handed the Princess shoes all covered with sparkling gems.

But these shoes, too, were immediately hurled back at the General. It was surprising how he managed to dodge.

"I don't want Chinese shoes! I don't, I don't, I don't!" The Princess jumped onto the throne and stamped her feet upon it.

The Tsar only threw up his hands.

And the Princess again seated herself on the throne.

No barrier I know,

My mind your warnings slip,

And barefoot I'll go

On an unending trip!

And the Tsar gave way. He burst into tears, wiping his tears with a handkerchief.

Is this bound to befall us

To boot

That the Princess should go barefoot!..

And the General was also terrified at the thought. He repeated in his trumpet-like voice:

Is this bound to befall us

To boot

That the Princess should go barefoot!..

"But where will she go barefoot?" the General said, starting up.

"Indeed, where will you go barefoot?" the Tsar asked wiping his last tear.

"To the shoemaker," the Princess shouted and threw away in opposite directions the shoes that the Tsar had got for her. "If you don't want to bring him here I myself will find him."

"What shoemaker?" asked the General.

"What shoemaker! What shoemaker!" the Tsar mimicked him. "The fellow who made the boots for our army and mended the Princess' shoe."

The Princess, too, helped him recall the man:

Boot-making for soldiers is a job

With which one's heart will sure throb...

"But what is he, after all?" the General cried out and even struck his hands together with emphasis. Then he paused and added in a contemptuous tone, "Just a mere peasant."

You'll see, for all that happens

I shan't anyone upbraid,

The only thing I'm wishing

Is getting the shoes he made!

With these words she resolutely pushed away the General and made for the door.

"Wait, daughter, wait!" the Tsar cried as he seized her hand. At this moment the door was thrown open and blaring flourishes of trumpet were heard.

"What's that?" the Tsar asked the General.

"Oh, I beg your pardon, Your Majesty. I quite forgot... An ambassador has come to make parley with you."



"An ambassador? Where? What ambassador?" the Tsar was saying as he bustled about the hall, thrusting the shoes under the throne.

The General rushed to his aid. The Princess alone did not stir a finger.

"What ambassador?" the Tsar repeated.

"Sent by Stepan the Grand, the Master-Hand," the Ambassador himself who had entered the hall reported instead of the General. The Tsar had to give up his unroyal occupation and seated himself on the throne as behoved a monarch. The General drew himself up to his full height, sticking out his chest.

"Sent by whom?" the Tsar asked over again as he pulled himself together.

"Sent by whom?" the General echoed just to keep up appearances.

"By Stepan the Grand, the Master-Hand," the Ambassador announced again with an air of importance. Certainly, you could hardly recognize the Fox in him. For besides the wonderful boots he wore a jacket embroidered with gold and a hood adorned with an ostrich feather. As for the tail, covered with a mantle, it might be easily mistaken for a sheathed sword.

"Never heard about such a person," said the Tsar in surprise.

"You haven't, but you will," the Ambassador declared.

"And then his name sounds too commonplace," the General said screwing up his face.

"A name doesn't count when one is rolling in wealth," retorted the Ambassador.

All this time the Princess could not take her eyes off the Ambassador's boots.

"Beg your pardon," she said at last, "where did you have such boots made?"

"I got them as a gift from my master," the Ambassador replied.

"But how can you prove that your master is really so wealthy?" the General inquired.

"Prove it?" the Ambassador said shrugging his shoulders. "By the gift, of course."

"Where is that gift?" the Tsar said eagerly. "Bring it here!"

"Bring them here!" the Ambassador corrected.

"Really?" the Tsar said in surprise. "Well, bring the gift here!"

The Ambassador stamped his heel three times. The door was thrown open and a group of hares came running into the throne hall, turning somersaults and singing as they came:

Stonecrop,
Stonecrop,
How lush it grows,

Though this plant
One never sows!
Stamp-stamp-stamp!
Run, hares, run!
We might've had some real fun!
Stamp-stamp-stamp!
Run, hares, run!
We might've had some real fun!

The Tsar even clapped his hands. And the Princess also brightened up.

"Oh, how nice! What lovely little hares! Where have you sprung from, grey little things?"

"We are sent by Stepan the Grand, the Master-Hand," the hares replied in chorus.

The General grew still more sullen.

"And this is all, is it?" he asked derisively.

The Ambassador again stamped his heel.

The door was again thrown open and a pack of wolves burst into the hall.

There was a regular commotion! The Tsar climbed onto the throne with his feet and all. The General got under the throne. Only his frightened voice was heard:

"Treason!.. Treason!.. Where are the dogs?"

The Princess bravely came forward to shield the hares. But the wolves never intended to attack anyone. They just sang the refrain of their song:

We, wolves,
We're hunting,
We'll search every nook,
We'll search everywhere,
Run here, run there,
We're here, just look!
We'll search everywhere,
Run here, run there,
We're here, just look!

Then they took up the little hares and went round and round with them in a dance...



The Tsar resumed his royal seat. The General, too, climbed out from under the throne. And the Princess started cutting capers together with the Ambassador. Barefooted.

The Tsar felt moved and was as pleased as Punch. He clapped his hands and inquired:

"Where have you sprung from, grey ones?"

"We are sent by Stepan the Grand, the Master-Hand," the wolves cried out in chorus.

The Tsar said:

"My dear Mr. Ambassador, pass our many thanks over to Stepan the Grand, the Master-Hand. But why did he send us such a gift?"

"For the sake of entertaining the guests during the wedding-party," the Ambassador replied without a moment's thinking.

"What wedding-party?" the General cried.

"Whose wedding-party?" the Princess asked and stamped her bare foot.

"The thing is, Your Majesty," the Ambassador explained, "that my honoured master, Stepan the Grand, the Master-Hand, asks for Your Majesty's consent that the beautiful Princess might bestow her hand upon him."

"What?!" the Princess cried out in indignation. "Without asking my consent?!"

"And what about me?" added the General.

"Silence!" the Tsar cried, getting angry. "Well, Mr. Ambassador, if your master is, in fact, so famous and wealthy, perhaps he'll be able to find a pair of remarkable shoes that might be to the Princess' liking?"

"Why not?" the Ambassador agreed with a gay air. "He will, most certainly."

"No! No! No!" shouted the Princess as she stamped her feet and screamed so loudly that even the hares and wolves had to stop their ears. "I don't want any shoes! Except the ones that the shoemaker is going to make."

"What shoemaker?" asked the Ambassador.

"The man who made the army boots," the Tsar explained reluctantly.

"The one who mended my shoe," the Princess added.

"Ah, and is that all?" the Ambassador said.

"Then, Your Majesty, I have a suggestion..."

"Well, well, out with it quick!" the Tsar pressed him.

"Your Majesty, order this shoemaker to be brought here."

"And leave him at the Palace for good," the Princess suggested with eagerness.

"Yes, leave him at the Palace," the Ambassador agreed, but instantly he introduced a condition, "if it will please him, of course!"

"And have him — and only him — makes shoes for me," the Princess demanded without heeding the Ambassador's concluding words.

"Yes, only him," echoed the Ambassador.

The General was about to raise objections but the Tsar would not allow him to do it.

"Shut up if you couldn't think up a thing."

"Well, what next, Honourable Sir?"

The Ambassador continued to speak:

"In the meantime I shall tell Stepan the Grand, the Master-Hand that he should also come here. And bring the shoes for the Princess. The most marvellous shoes in the world. If the Princess likes them, we'll arrange the wedding-party at once. If she doesn't..."

The Ambassador made a gesture of regret with a sly grin.

"Do you agree to this, daughter?" the Tsar asked tentatively.

The young woman was lost in thought for an instant.

"I do," she said, "just the same, there's no one who could make better shoes."

"But what about me?" the General demanded.

The Tsar quickly turned to him.

"You carry out my orders. Have the hares and wolves received as the best of guests... in the barn. Have an apartment prepared for Stepan the Grand, the Master-Hand. That's all."

"And you, daughter, and I, and you, Mr. Ambassador, might as well have lunch..."

And the Tsar, accompanied by his daughter and the Ambassador, left the throne-hall.

The General took command at once.

"Hey, there," he cried, "take these to the barn!"

The door was thrown open. And the wolves and the hares rather reluctantly walked over to where the General pointed them to go.

"And put a padlock on the door!" the General cried when the last of the beasts was out of sight. "A big padlock!"

He looked to the left, then to the right.

"And I shall have the shoemaker arrested. He will make the shoes... And I will take those shoes to the Princess. I! I!.. If the Princess likes the shoes...she will marry me... As for Stepan the Grand, the Master-Hand, I'll receive him too..."

With these words he got a black band out of his purse and tied it over one of his eyes.



From another purse he took out a mirror, looked into it, and was pleased. His spirits rose, and he burst into a song. Then he started dancing.

The prince or the shoemaker
Who their way went
Should know awaits them
An ignominious end.
One, two!
Left, right!
Isn't the General
Really bright?
The one and the other
Into prison'll be cast
And both of'em are bound
To breathe their last.

One, two!
Left, right!
Isn't the General
Real bright?

Here he pricked up his ears, took off the band from his eye and sang in a half-whisper:
The Tsar will be hailing
More joyous time:
His daughter I'll marry,
On the throne I'll climb.

One, two
Left, right!
Isn't the General
Really bright?

By way of preparing himself for his future rank, the General climbed upon the throne. And he was far from being aware of the fact that his every movement was closely watched from behind the throne by the Fox.





A cell in a vault. An iron-clad door. Stone walls. A faint ray of daylight penetrating from somewhere at the top. It was here that shoemaker Stepan sat now on a stone. Alone. Upset. He sat staring at the spot from where the ray of light came. He was singing as he looked.

I wish to God that you did not
To royal blood belong!
It falls to me as my hard lot
For you forlornly t'long!
We'd be birds of a feather
Were you not Princess in this land,
We'd always be together
A-walking hand-in-hand!

The heavy drawbar rattled. The iron-bound door turned on its rusty hinges with a screech. And two soldiers stepped aside to let the General pass into the dungeon.

"Why the hell are you singing like that?" he bellowed. "There's a nightingale for us! Don't imagine you're going to sit idle here. Hey! Give him the kit and everything else that may be needed!"

The soldiers instantly brought him an iron shoe-tree which is part of the usual shoemaker's outfit, wooden lasts, a pot of nails, a number of hammers and a large skein of cobbler's thread.

"Get down to work at once," the General ordered, "so that the shoes should be ready by



morning. And mind, if the Princess doesn't like them it will cost you your head!.."

The door again creaked on its rusty hinges. Again the heavy bolt rattled. And again Stepan found himself alone. He seized the iron shoe-tree and began to batter the door with it. But it was no use. The door would not give an inch. Only the sounds of the blows reverberated far and wide like peals of thunder. And then all was still... Stepan waved his hand hopelessly. He sat down and began to sing:

We'd be birds of a feather
Were you not Princess in this land,
We'd always be together
A-walking hand-in-hand!

Would stars on us look down
Until the early dawn,
If Princess of the crown
You weren't by ill hap born!

For a while he was lost in thought. Suddenly he struck his fist on his knee.

"Why snivel like that? As though I were not at all a workman but an aristocrat... The Fox sent me word that I should make shoes for the Princess. The loveliest in the world! The most remarkable ones! Why am I wasting the precious hours?"

He placed the iron shoe-tree in front of him, and took up the hammer. The nails were ready at hand and he waxed the thread.

And soon the work was in full swing. To the accompaniment of a song, of course.

To keep away the sorrow,
Postpone not till t'morrow
But work today,
But work today,
And you'll be always gay!
I'll make every endeavour
As wondrous shoes as ever

To make for my dear Princess
In a miraculous way!

I say,

I say,

In a miraculous way!

Work accompanied by a song goes fine. Even
in captivity.

Stepan examined the result of his labour.
He admired it himself.

What shoes! What shoes!

The best you can ever choose!

Just can't

Off them

You ever take your eyes!

He took up his hammer again.

A hammer... a toe-nail...

You drive it in... don't fail...

So that, my dear Princess,

Walk with a strut you may!

I say,

I say,

Walk with a strut you may!

At last his job was accomplished. Stepan
laid the shoes in front of him. But all of a
sudden...

"What's that?" Stepan stood still, on the
alert. "There's a slight noise behind the wall."

He pricked up his ears...

"Yes, somebody is making a noise. Can it
be that someone is digging a tunnel under
the wall? Now... there are voices..."

Indeed, from a certain spot under the wall
voices could be heard. They were growing louder.
More and more distinct. Somebody was at work,
singing a song to keep up his own spirits:

Toil on,

Toil on

Full tilt!

At the crawlway

In a secret way!

Fire away!
Fire away!
Make the crawlway,
Don't stop!..

Stepan seized his iron shoe-tree and began to remove stones from his own side of the wall.

Now the voices seemed to be quite close:

We'll help our Stepan —
The greatest Master-Hand,
The sun will then be shining
More brightly for us all.

For all,

For all,

More brightly for us all.

And now... What's that? Stepan jumped over to the opposite wall. A hare leaped out of the underground passage into the dungeon. A wolf followed him. Another hare came and another wolf... Soon the dungeon was crowded.

Finally the Fox in the guise of an ambassador made his appearance. He threw off his hood and made a low bow.

"Good evening, Stepan the Grand, the Master-Hand! Receive your devoted friends, your faithful servants!"

"Why! It appears I have a great many friends?" Stepan cried out in surprise.

"A good man always has a lot of friends," the Fox commented and then added, "but right now we haven't got time for much talking. Are the shoes ready?"

"Here they are."

"Oh, how lovely they look! It takes one's breath away to look at them. Well, Stepan the Grand, the Master-Hand, now to the Princess, quick! Victory is near at hand!.."

"And may we sing?" the Old Hare asked the Fox.

"Wh-a-at?" the Fox cried indignantly.

"We'll do it softly," the Hare assured him.
"Yes, very softly," the Wolf said.
And the Fox agreed, "All right... go ahead...
only softly... very softly..."

And the beasts began singing softly:

If questions are put to you,
You, wolves, or you, hares,
Don't try to evade them,
Speak as plain as you can:
You are hearty supporters
Of the nobleman who bears —
Who proudly bears —

The commonplace name of — Stepan!

The Fox was the first to drop out of sight
into the underground passage. Stepan followed
him. The hares and wolves came after them.

The dungeon was empty now. The faint little
ray of light quivered and melted away.





There were Maids of Honour and Courtiers crowding round the empty throne in the throne-hall. Against the walls the soldiers stood at attention in the guard of honour.

Both the Maids of Honour and the Courtiers were engaged in animated talk in wispers. The drone of voices was like the hum of a disturbed swarm of bees. Now and again one could make out separate words, "Neither the shoemaker... Nor the Master-Hand...", "The General is gone, too..."

Finally this discordant murmur turned into a song full of disapproval. The Maids of Honour were particularly excited:

Imagine what is happening!

The morals do get loose:

The Princess, a shameless woman,
Goes about without shoes.

The Princess, a shameless woman,
Goes about without shoes!

And the Courtiers did not lag behind:

So obstinate and resolute,

She gets out of hand.

Deliberately treading

The grass, the cobbles and sand.

Then they began saying all at once:

What's happening?

What's passing?

What can but all this mean?

That a natural-born Princess

Should of a cobbler dream!



The sound of trumpets came and the talking died away instantly. The Maids of Honour smartened themselves up. The Courtiers pulled themselves together. The soldiers presented arms.

The door was thrown open. The Tsar and the Princess entered the throne-hall. As before, she was barefoot.

Forgetting all that they had just been saying the Courtiers began to glorify the Tsar:

We glorify our Tsar,

When he is gentle,

And when irate,

His royal name

We celebrate!

We glorify our Tsar!

We glorify the Tsar —

hurrah!

We glorify the Tsar —

hurrah!

Glory to him —

hurrah, hurrah, hurrah!

The Tsar patiently listened to the greeting. Although it was clear that his thoughts were elsewhere.

The Maids of Honour went out of their way to show that they were enchanted with the shameless Princess, so they took up the song in their turn:

The splendour of our household —

The Princess we'll immortalize —

She puts in shade the early sunrise

Whose beauty is untold!

Glory to her —

hurrah!

Glo...

The Princess thought she'd heard enough. She stamped her bare heel on the inlaid floor.

"That'll do! Enough! Saying one thing to my face, another thing behind my back!"

The frightened Maids of Honour bowed low nearly to the very floor. And by way of proving their faithfulness piped up in chorus:

By blood we are your sisters,
And servitors to boot.
To follow the Princess
We'll all walk barefoot!

They threw their lovely shoes and slippers off their feet and started dancing barefoot:

To follow the Princess
We'll all walk barefoot.

The Courtiers and even the soldiers also bent down to reach for their boots as they sang:

To follow the...

But the Tsar stopped them in time:

"You couldn't think of a cleverer thing to do, could you? Well, those are women... But it doesn't behoove us, men! What will they think of us in the neighbouring states?"

"As for me, Dad, it's of no interest to me what they will think of us in the neighbouring states," the Princess said. "I'd like to know one thing: when will the shoemaker be here? All your terms are at an end."

"I should also like to know," the Tsar said, "when will Stepan the Grand, the Master-Hand be here?"

"Shoemaker... shoemaker... shoemaker..." the Maids of Honour whispered to each other.

"The Master-Hand... the Master-Hand... the Master-Hand," one Cortier was saying to another.

However, no one could say anything definite either about one or the other.

"Where is the General?" the Tsar demanded indignantly. "Call the General here!"

The soldiers stuck out their chests:

Left! Right!
One, two, one!

But the General

there is none!

"How's that — none?" the Tsar said, beside himself with rage. "Why?"

"Where is the General?" the Maids of Honour were asking the soldiers.

But the soldiers only shrugged their shoulders three times. All to a man.

The Tsar only waved his hand, looking tired:

"No order in that state of ours."

"Dad, you yourself are to blame," the Princess remarked in an acid tone.

These words touched the Tsar on the raw.

"Hey, people!" he called with an imperious air. "Make our royal edict known all over the country!" And he began to dictate, "Whoever finds the General before evening or informs us about his whereabouts is entitled to a large reward. That's all! Attach my seal to the edict!"

"A fat lot I care about your General," the Princess said, "you had better look for the shoemaker..."

The Tsar did not say anything to this, for at this moment Stepan the Grand's Ambassador, already familiar to us, entered the hall.

"Your Majesty," he said turning to the Tsar and bowing low before him, cap in hand. And then he began singing:

Stepan the Grand,
The Master-Hand,
My worthy prince,
Shortly, that is, before long,
Will come along!

"At last!" the Tsar cried happily. "Where did you tarry so long, honourable sir?"

The Ambassador explained:

On the way
My noble lord

Met with a great many
Ordeals...

"What happened?" the Tsar asked in an alarmed tone. And the Ambassador told his story:

Upon us
In the woods
The robbers fell.
Our lives we risked...
Oh, that was
Hell!

"Robbers!" the Tsar was outraged. "What was the General thinking of?"

The Princess showed great interest in the news. She motioned to her father not to interrupt the Ambassador.

My valiant master could
His prowess show,
He never would
Lie low.
He rushed —

to fight!

"Ah," the Maids of Honour sighed. However, the Ambassador paid no attention to them.

The robbers'
Chieftain

He dealt a quick crushing blow.

"Oh!" both the Courtiers and the soldiers cried in chorus.

The Ambassador looked round them all proudly.

And tied
Him
Tight!

The audience clapped their hands in admiration. The Princess alone pretended that the story did not seem to her very exciting. Naturally her thoughts ran on the shoemaker.

Prevailing
Over the buccaneer,

He brings
The brigand
Right here! —

the Ambassador wound up on a triumphant note and then lapsed into common parlance:

"Only... I'm ashamed to go on..."

"Do say it!" the Tsar demanded impatiently.

"My Master's clothes in the fight with the robbers were all torn to pieces. He doesn't know how he can come before you... and before Her Highness..."

"And that is all?" the Tsar commented, brightening up. And he gave an order:

"Hey! Servants! Send royal clothes to Stepan the Grand, the Master-Hand who's on his way here."

"And then, Your Majesty," the Ambassador made another bow, "while my master is changing his clothes, please, order the robbers' Chieftain to be brought here..."

"Bring the robbers' Chieftain," the Tsar commanded. "I'll show him..." And he shook his fist threateningly.

The soldiers marched out with a song:

Either enemies attacking
Or parading, we defile
Forward, backward
Without delay —
All's the same
For rank and file,
Only orders
We obey!

They returned with the same song, carrying a large sack tied with a thick cord.

"Here he is," the Ambassador cried in a triumphant tone.

The Tsar ordered the sack to be untied.

The Maids of Honour and the Courtiers fell back a few paces out of harm's way.

The soldiers held up their rifles.
At last the cord fell to the floor...
The sack fell to the floor...

For a minute or two the Tsar stared at the man. His one eye was covered with a black band. The way a regular brigand would have it. But he was wearing... the General's tunic. And he had the General's moustache.

"General!" the Tsar ventured at last.

"General!.. Our General!" the Maids of Honour and the Courtiers said in a whisper.

"General—how's that?" the Ambassador cried in a tone of outrage. "He fell on my worthy Master in the midst of the forest!"

"That was a mistake!" the General whimpered. "A regrettable mistake, Your Majesty!"

Here Stepan himself entered the hall. In his

royal clothes and accompanied by the wolves and the hares, he looked a regular Grand Man.

Stepan's eyes met the Princess' glance. He was so embarrassed that he was unable to move.

The Princess, too, stood like one enchanted. Her gaze was riveted on Stepan's eyes.

As if in an attempt to overcome the general embarrassment, the Ambassador announced in a loud voice:

"My worthy master Stepan the Grand, the Master-Hand."

The General, ignored by everyone, fixed his in-



tent gaze on Stepan. Suddenly he struck his hands and dropped on his knees before the Tsar.

"Sire, is that man a Prince? They are trying to take you in! He is a shoemaker!"

The Ambassador promptly aided the Princess and Stepan. Giving the Tsar no time to collect his wits, he again made a low bow.

"Your Majesty! My worthy master again ordered me to ask for your gracious consent to bestow Her Highness' hand..."

And he winked at the Princess with a conspiratorial air.

"I consent! I consent!" the Princess whispered without waiting for her father's reply.

The General hobbled towards the Tsar, his feet hampered with the sack. This finally provoked the sovereign.

"Ah, you are still here, are you?!" the Tsar cried angrily and tore the golden epaulettes off the General's shoulders. "You're no longer a General! Have him thrown out of here!"

"Ah, you're out for some foul play!" the General cried as the soldiers started thrusting him back into the sack. "I'll make you sorry for that! I'll hire out to another Tsar! I'll make war on you..." These last words were uttered already from behind the door.

In the meantime the Princess had taken a step forward to meet Stepan. And Stepan stretched out his hands, holding out to her the most marvellous shoes in the world.

Both burst into a song. One and the same tune. And although the words of the song were not exactly similar their voices sounded extremely melodious. This even brought tears to the eyes of the Maids of Honour and the Courtiers. The Tsar again pulled out his handkerchief. This time because of joy.



I'm weary of sorrowing
From night till early morn.
Why not a country woman
But Princess —

was I born? —

the Princess sang.

I wish to God that you did not
To royal blood belong!
It falls to me as my hard lot
For you forlornly t'long! —

Stepan joined in.

By and by they found themselves quite
close to one another.

Stepan knelt and carefully put a new shoe
on one of the Princess' feet. Then on the other.

Their voices rang out in still greater unison:
Would stars on us look down
Until the early dawn,
If Princess...

Here the Princess put in "I", and Stepan
"you". The remaining part of the song was
pretty much the same.

If Princess of the Crown
You (I) weren't —

by ill hap born!

The Maids of Honour stared enviously at
the shoes on the Princess' feet:

What wondrous splendid shoes —
One may one's reason lose!
Just can't
Off them

You ever take your eyes!

And the Courtiers joined in:

The shoes're superb — that man
Has done the best he can.
We hope to your wedding
We'll invitation get.

Just don't forget
To call us, don't forget!

Here the Tsar brushed away the largest tear and asked the Princess in a quavering voice:

"Daughter, but how can I possibly consent to your marrying a shoemaker, a common man?"

"But for me he will forever remain Stepan the Grand, the Master-Hand," said the Princess. The Ambassador again came forward.

"Beg your pardon, Your Majesty," he said with extreme civility, "you promised to give your daughter in marriage to the man who'd be able to please her with the shoes. My master has lived up to this condition. You promised a reward to the person who'd find the General. My master did not only find him, but brought him here. And the best reward for my master will be if you bid your daughter the Princess to marry Stepan..."

"What kind of bidding — that," the Tsar replied with a sigh. All of a sudden he turned to Stepan as if a bright idea struck him.

"I say, Stepan, my dear fellow, wouldn't you step into the General's shoes? There are spare epaulettes, too..."

"No, Your Gracious Majesty, no!" Stepan said in a determined tone. "I have been a shoemaker, a shoemaker I will remain..."

"Perhaps you will stay at my court," the Tsar urged. "I'll let you have half of my palace... nay, half of my kingdom!"

"Excuse me, Your Majesty, but the air here is nothing like the air in the country."

"How about you, daughter?" the Tsar said turning to the Princess. "Will you go to live in a peasant's house?"

"I'll follow my lord and master," the Princess replied.

"What can't be cured must be endured," the Tsar commented making a helpless gesture, "go ahead and get married, you two!"



The happy Princess rushed towards Stepan who threw his arms round her. Then, holding her in his embrace, Stepan spoke:

"Darling, before we make arrangements for our wedding-party, allow me to turn to our gracious Tsar with my last request."

"Do, please, my lord," the Princess agreed.

"Make your request," the Tsar said.

Stepan bowed and said:

"Your Majesty, order the boots I made for your army to be brought here."

"Bring those boots here," the Tsar commanded.

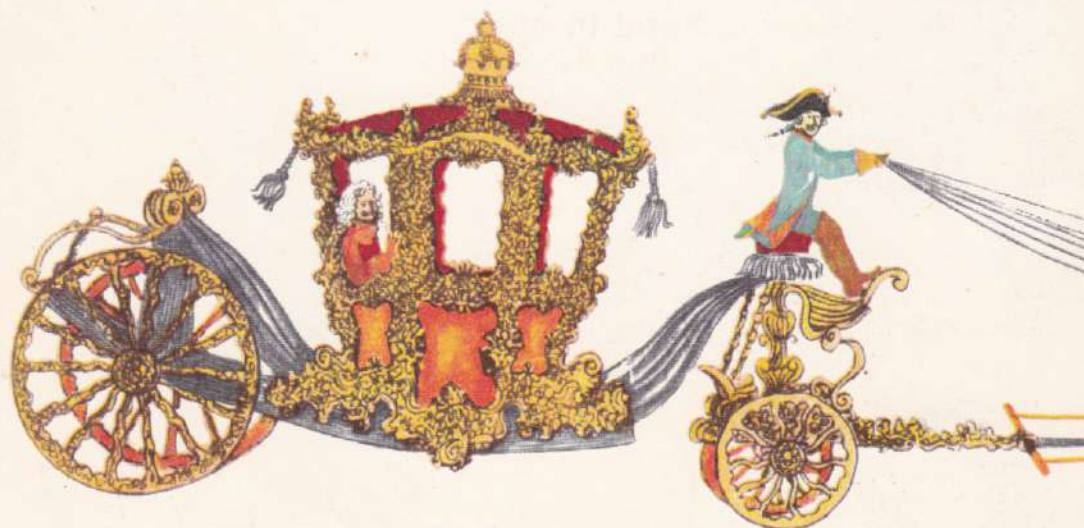
"And have them handed out among my comrades, the forest creatures who helped me when I was in trouble. It doesn't become them to attend a wedding-feast barefooted."

"Well done!" the Fox praised Stepan.

"Hand the boots out among Stepan's friends," the Tsar ordered.

The soldiers carried out the order at once.

What fun it was for the wolves and the hares to put the boots on their feet! They started gamboling and broke into a song!



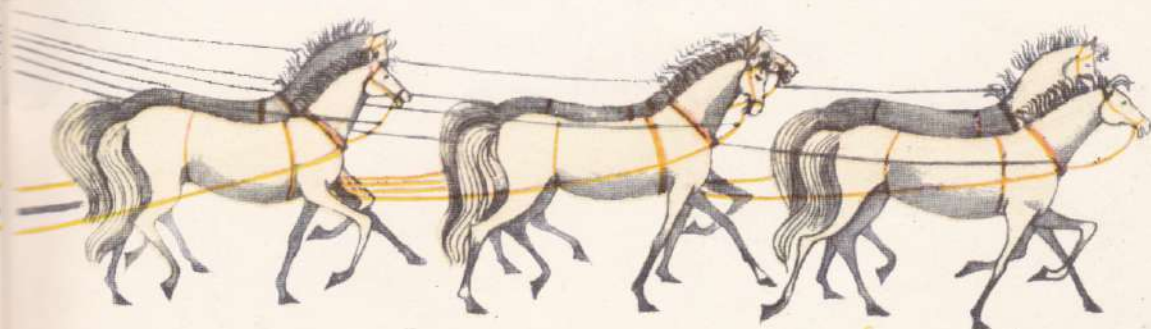
These boots I sing!
These boots I sing!
They are a very special thing,
They help one run —
It is great fun
When *in* the hunting dogs are done!
Though the pack
Does howl somewhere,
They will never get our scent.
Each has new boots —
To say the least —
And isn't just a mere beast!
We shall be dancing
At the celebration
A whole week — that's no exaggeration!
Happiness
To you, Stepan,
Our Stepan
The Grand,
The Master-Hand!

And more adroitly than everybody else and more playfully jumped the Fox.

The Maids of Honour and the Courtiers joined in the dance. And the soldiers, too, began to tap their feet.

Then Stepan, hand in hand with the Princess and the Fox, led the dancers to the centre of the dancing ring.

My friends and companions,
said Stepan, addressing all those present,





You, worthy retainers! —
the Fox added, referring to the Tsar's retinue.
And they both wound up in chorus:

In our village

A visit

Please pay us!

And the whole crowd started out to Stepan's village.

They walked over hills and valleys. Through groves and forests. Across fields of corn and flowering meadows. They sang as they walked. Even the Tsar himself joined in the singing as he kept looking out of his carriage. Although the song's words were not much to his liking.

We are loyal to friendship,

Inviolable friendship,

To generous friendship —

As true as we can.

For we are in the service,

For we are in the service,

We are in the service

Of a shoemaker and not a nobleman!

And when they came to the village the wedding-party was at its highest.

And I had a good feed, I drank the meed, it streamed down my chin but missed my mouth. They gave me a bow, but what to do with it I didn't know. They gave me a pan and into the street I ran. I was eating a pancake — all the guests would partake. Kids came and one of them said:

"Give me some."

I answered:

"Help yourself, chum!"

I gave some to another, still another took a bit — there was nothing left for me, but I didn't care a whit.



STEPAN THE GRAND, THE MASTER-HAND
A Tale for the Theatre and Also for Reading
Translated from the Byelorussian by Apollo Weise
Edited by Mary Mintz
Illustrated by Antonina Lapitskaya
Yunatsstva Publishers
1982

(0—48)

Printed in the USSR

Артур Витальевич
Вольский

СТЕПАН —
ВЕЛИКИЙ ПАН

Сказка для чтения
и представления
На английском языке

Перевод сделан по книге:
Артур Вольскі. Сцяпан — вялікі пан.
Казка для тэатра і для чытання таксама.
Мн., «Мастацкая літаратура», 1979.

